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ABSTRACT

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Depression and Acculturation in Mexican-American Women

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Abstract

It has been postulated that the result of the Mexican woman's inability to live up to the stiff requirements of her culture should show itself in depressive trends. These theories are often applied to the Mexican-American female as well. The aim of this study was to determine if acculturation is related to depression in Mexican-American females. A second goal was to determine if Mexican-American women report higher depression scores compared to Anglo-American females, when the variables of age, education, and occupation of the head of the household are controlled. Subjects included 53 Mexican-American and 53 Anglo-American women between the ages of 18 and 72. All subjects were administered depression and acculturation scales. Results showed no significant relationship between depression and acculturation and that Chicano females had significantly higher depression scores than the Anglo-American females. The "Mexican neurosis" and possible reasons for these higher depression scores are discussed.

Depression and Acculturation in Mexican-American Women

Diaz-Guerrero (1975) postulated that the result of the Mexican women's inability to live up to the stiff requirements of their culture should show itself in depressive trends. Research in Mexico City (Diaz-Guerrero, 1975) revealed that when asked, "Do you often feel very depressed?", 57% of the women sampled responded "yes." There are some data to suggest higher depression rates of Mexican-American women in clinical populations. For example, Jaco (1959) studied new psychotic cases for the two year period of 1951-1952 in Texas and found that for manic-depression and psychotic depression Chicano females had a rate more than twice that of non-white females. In a study where child guidance clients were matched on income, differences between Mexican-Americans and Anglo-American showed depression in Mexican-American girls exceeded depression in Anglo-American girls by a rate of three to one (Stoker & Meadow, 1974). Heiman and Kahn (1974) report that the patients in a mental health center designed to reach high risk Mexican-Americans were mostly young women with marital problems, somatic complaints, and depressive symptoms.

While some clinical investigations (Jaco, 1959; Stoker & Meadow, 1974) have shown the Chicano female to be depressed when compared to other groups of females, not all research has come to the same conclusion. Comparing Mexican-American inpatients to Anglo-American inpatients, Meadow and Stoker (1965) studied a random sample of 120 Mexican-Americans and 120 Anglo-Americans. Each group had 60 males and 60 females. Their study of Mexican-American and Anglo-American females revealed that affective symptoms such as crying spells, hyperactivity, irritability, depression, and temper tantrums

were greater in the Chicano female, while there were slightly more manic-depressive and depressive reactions in the Anglo female.

Other studies have compared Chicano females to other groups of females in the general population. To compare depression levels of Mexican-American and black females in a Southwest city, Quesada, Spears, and Ramos (1978) studied a random sample of eleven census tracts. Results showed a slightly higher prevalence of depression in blacks than in Mexican-Americans. Using a probability sample from Alameda County, California, Roberts and Roberts (1982) found higher depression scores in Chicano females than in Chicano males. Adjusting for the effects of age, education, and income reduced but did not eliminate sex differences. Lang, Munoz, Bernal, and Sarensen (1982) used a random telephone survey in San Francisco and also found higher depression scores in Latino (mostly Chicano) women than in Latino men.

These studies raise many questions and there is no consensus of opinion regarding depression in the Chicano female. While the ideas of Diaz-Guerrero (1975) appear to be widely accepted for the Chicano (Montiel, 1973; Staples, 1971; Staton, 1972; Ramirez, 1967), it seems there is no research which attempts to correlate depression with anything except demographic variables. If the Mexican-American woman, in trying to live up to the cultural demands, develops depressive symptoms, data in a study designed to correlate the level of acculturation and the level of depression should support this assumption. To determine if the Mexican-American female is more depressed than other female groups, a study must control the factors of socioeconomic status, age, and education. Another important aspect often overlooked in past studies is

the use of a depression scale that was designed for the general population and that has reliability for Mexican-Americans.

A knowledge of the traditional Mexican family structure is an important prerequisite for understanding the Chicano because the Mexican-American is closely tied to Mexico (See Diaz-Guerrero, 1975; Penalosa, 1968). In summary, Diaz-Guerrero described the Mexican family as being founded upon two fundamental propositions: absolute supremacy of the father and absolute self-sacrifice of the mother. The Mexican mother is supposed to deny all possible selfish aims. The Mexican father is to be obeyed and respected in all matters.

Based on these ideas, Diaz-Guerrero believes the Mexican family is a favorable setting for the development of neurosis. This is especially true with females because Mexican women may have problems in living up to the strict cultural demands. Their inability to live up to these demands should show itself in self-belittlement, depressive trends, an old-maid complex if she does not marry, and more psychosomatic ailments than men.

Regarding the Chicano family, there appears not to be one specific type of Mexican-American family. Instead, there are thousands of Chicano families, each one different according to regional, historical, political, socio-economic, acculturation and assimilation factors (Murillo, 1976). Results of studies of acculturation of Mexican-Americans revealed that acculturation has separated the Chicano family from the Mexican prototype (Martinez, 1977). What can be said of the Chicano family is that the family structure may be very "Mexican," very "Anglo," or somewhere in between.

The purpose of this study was to determine if acculturation is related to depression in Mexican-American females. A second goal was to determine if Mexican-American women have higher depression scores when compared to Anglo-American females when the variables of age, education, and occupation of the head of the household are controlled. It was hypothesized that acculturation would be related to depression and that when the variables mentioned were controlled Chicano women would not have significantly higher depression scores than Anglo women.

Method

Subjects

The sample for this study was drawn from undergraduate education classes at a small university in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, from undergraduate psychology classes at a small midwest university, and from social service agencies in the metropolitan Kansas City area. The total number of subjects was N = 106; n = 53 Anglo-American females and n = 53 Mexican-American females. Fifteen of the Chicano women were from the southern Texas university. Of the Mexican-American group, 26 were first-generation and 27 were third-generation. The sample ranged in age from 18 to 72 with a median age of 28. The reported annual family income of 25 of the Chicano women was below the median for Mexican-Americans, 26 women reported income above the median, and two Mexican-American women refused to indicate their income. Thirty-seven of the Chicano women reported that the heads of the households were blue collar workers and 16 reported that white collar workers were the heads of the households. Under the education category, 25 reported high school graduation or less, 18 reported 1-4 years of college, and 10 reported being college

graduates. The Anglo women had similar demographic characteristics because they were matched on demographic variables.

Instruments

Depressive symptoms were measured with the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression (CES-D) Scale. The CES-D is a 20 item self-report scale designed to measure depressed mood in community settings (Markush & Favero, 1973). The CES-D has a range of 0 to 60 and score of 16 or more is considered a case of depression (Comstock & Helsing, 1976). The original standardization of the CES-D with community populations was completed in Kansas City, Missouri, and Washington County, Maryland, in 1971 (Comstock & Helsing, 1976). Later, Radloff (1977) reported results of field testing of the CES-D. Internal consistency was about .85 in the general population sample, about .90 in the patient sample, and test-retest correlations were between .45 and .70. To assess reliability of the CES-D with Mexican-Americans, Roberts (1980) administered the CES-D to a sample consisting of 254 Anglos, 270 blacks, and 181 Chicanos. Internal consistency reliability ranged from 0.85 to 0.91.

Acculturation was measured by the scale developed by Olmedo, Martinez, and Martinez (1978). Acculturation was defined as the "linear combination of semantic and sociocultural variables which provides the best least square estimate of that individual's score on a dichotomous variable in which Chicanos are assigned a value of 0 and Anglos a value of 1" (Olmedo et al. 1978, p. 165). Results of initial research showed a mean of 54 for Anglos and 38 for Chicanos. To validate the acculturation scale on a population different in terms of age and geographic location from the original normative

Subjects were matched one for one so that each Chicano subject had a corresponding Anglo subject who was from the same geographic area, in the same age and educational category, and who reported the same occupational category for the head of the household. Once the Mexican-American subjects were matched to the Anglo-American subjects, all questionnaires were scored.

Results

Mean CES-D scores for the Anglo-American sample and for the Mexican-American sample are shown in Table 1. The mean CES-D depression scores for Chicano females of 16.91 found in this study differed from the mean of 13.81 reported by Roberts and Roberts (1982), but was very similar to the mean of 16.1 found by Lang et al. (1982).

A *t*-test to compare the depression scores of the Mexican-American and Anglo-American subjects demonstrated significantly higher depression scores for the Mexican-American group, $t\ (104) = -2.22$, $P < .05$. A one-way analysis of variance between Anglo and all Mexican-Americans indicated a significant difference in depression scores, $F(1, 104) = 4.94$, $p < .05$. There was no significant difference when Anglos, first- and third-generation Chicanos were compared using a one-way analysis of variance. A *t*-test comparing mean depression scores for first- and third-generation Chicanos showed no significant differences.

The means and standard deviations of the acculturation scores for the Anglo- and Mexican-Americans are found in Table 2. The mean of .20 found in this study for Chicanos, differed from the mean of .30 found by both Olmedo et al. (1978), and by Kranua et al. (1982). A one-way analysis of variance revealed no significant differences between acculturation and the demographic

population and to assess construct validity by comparing first-and third-generation Mexican-Americans, Olmedo and Padilla (1978) selected 26 Anglo-Americans as well as 16 first-generation and 26 third-generation Mexican-Americans. Results showed significant differences between the means of 34 for first-generation Chicanos, 38 for third-generation Mexican-Americans and 54 for Anglos.

Procedure

The CES-D, acculturation scale, and background information questionnaire were given to a sample of Mexican-American females. Twenty-six first- and 27 third-generation Mexican-American females were selected. The instruments were then given to a sample of Anglo-American females. Fifty-three Anglo-American females were matched on the variables of age, education, occupation of the head of the household and geographic area to the selected 53 Mexican-American females. The CES-D, acculturation scale, and background information questionnaire all have instructions that were read to the subjects before they began to complete them. All materials were presented during the same administration.

Subjects were grouped into age categories each of which had an age range of five years. All subjects were asked to indicate their education level as 0-8 years, 9-12 years, 1-4 years of college, or college graduate. The occupations of the heads of the households were grouped into seven categories adapted from the occupational scale of Hollinghead (Note 1). In addition, a category for students and a category for the unemployed were added. Ethnic status was determined by self-designation through the following question; Ethnic background: Mexican/Mexican-American; Anglo; black; and other (specify).

variables of occupation of household, marital status, or educational levels. One-way analysis of variance of acculturation scores between Anglos, first-, and third-generation Mexican-Americans revealed a significant difference between the three groups, $F(2, 103) = 97.04$, $p < .01$. A Scheffe's test to determine where the significant differences were showed that Anglos scored significantly higher than first-generation Mexican-Americans, $p < .01$, and significantly higher than third-generation Chicanos, $p < .01$. The first-generation Mexican-Americans also had significantly higher acculturation scores, $F(2, 103) = 7.47$, $p < .01$ than third-generation Chicanos.

A Pearson product-moment correlation of depression and acculturation scores revealed that non-significant relationships existed for all Mexican-Americans, all Anglo-Americans, and for first- and third-generation Chicano females.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

Discussion

This study was designed to determine if a relationship exists between depression and acculturation in Chicano females and to determine if Chicanos showed higher depression scores than Anglos matched for age, education, and occupation of the head of household. Results showed that for this sample of Mexican-American females, no significant relationship existed between depression and acculturation, but Mexican-American women had significantly higher depression scores than the Anglo females.

Women were studied in order to have a more homogeneous population and because the prevalence of symptoms of depression is higher in women (Phillip & Segal, 1969). In addition, although Diaz-Guerrero (1975) has demonstrated that Mexican women have depressive trends, no study has shown any relationship between acculturation and depression in Chicano females. The CES-D was employed because it has been shown to have validity with Chicanos and because it was designed for use with community samples. First- and third-generation Chicanos were used because generation has an important effect on acculturation (Olmedo & Padilla, 1978; Keefe, 1980) and because acculturation scores have been found to be lowest for first-generation Chicanos, highest for Anglos, with third-generation Mexican-Americans in between (Olmedo & Padilla, 1978). The acculturation score of Olmedo et al. (1978) has also been found to be related to marital status, education, and age (Kranau, Green & Valencia-Weber, 1982).

The results of cross-cultural studies of psychopathology may be a result of the instruments employed (Draguns, 1973); however, research with the CES-D and Mexican-Americans has indicated that the quality of the data was not significantly different from that of other ethnic groups (Roberts, 1980). Research into interviewing has demonstrated that data can be attained with the same degree of reliability from Mexican-Americans as from any other group (Welch, Comer, & Steinman, 1973). In addition, past research with Chicanos has shown that Mexican-Americans appear as willing as other groups to submit to interviews, that cultural differences do not appear to be so great as to bar the study of Anglos and Chicanos with the same procedures, and that non-citizens are not likely to object to being interviewed (Freeman, 1969).

This research also found significantly higher depression scores for Chicanos when compared to Anglo females even when the subjects were matched on the variables of age, education, and occupation of head of the household. This finding agrees with the latest data on the prevalence of higher depression scores among Mexican-American women (Roberts & Roberts, 1982).

While this sample of Mexican-American women reported higher depression scores even when matched on SES variables, it is not clear why this is so. Different rates of inter-racial depression have been explained as a function of the perceptual differences of the Anglo diagnosticians (Hanson & Klerman, 1974). Since the Mexican-American faces powerful forces such as discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion from policy and program decisions (Cervantes, 1972), these forces may result in higher depression scores. The "mask of survival" (Quesada et al., 1978), which forces Chicanos to display a second identity to the outside world, may make the individual aware of how powerless she is in the world. Chicanos can observe a higher standard of living, but often are not able to experience this higher standard. This is confirmed by Census data that reports 18.6% of Chicano families are below the proverty level compared to 8.6% of non-Spanish-origin families (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980), and that median income for Hispanics is $14,711 compared to $20,840 for whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982). Therefore, they may have higher depression scores because it is beyond their resources to achieve their desired standard of living (Quesada et al., 1978). Finally, the higher depression scores found in the Chicano women of this study may be a function of the cultural differences between Anglos and Chicanos.

The idea that the inability to live up to strict cultural demands may lead to depressive trends was rejected since acculturation had no relationship to depression. The variables of sex roles, performance of marital roles, stress, self-identity, and male-female relationships may be related to the higher depression scores of Chicano women and therefore need investigation.

While response bias may not confound responses by Mexican-American on the CES-D (Vernon, Roberts, & Lee, 1982), the validity of self-report depression scales for Chicanos to date has not been researched. It may be that while Mexican-American women report more depressive symptoms they may not be judged by trained raters as being as depressed as their self-reports indicate.

Since depression was found not to be related to acculturation, and since outpatients were not found to differ in acculturation from non-outpatients (Fabrega & Wallace, 1968), the theory of the "Mexican neurosis" (Diaz-Guerrero, 1975; Garza, 1976) being tied to traditional beliefs needs to be reevaluated. Since the myth of male dominance in decision making within Mexican and Mexican-American families was refuted (Cromwell & Ruiz, 1979), and since traditional Mexican family beliefs do not appear to represent present day Chicano beliefs (Gonzalez, 1982), the idea of the "Mexican national neurosis" applied to Chicanos, may also be rejected through the scrutiny of empirical inquiry.

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Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation CES-D Scores

	M	SD
Anglo American Females	12.57	10.20
n = 53		
Mexican-American Females	16.91	9.89
n = 53		
First-generation Mexican-Americans	16.50	8.57
n = 26		
Third-generation Mexican-Americans	17.30	11.17
n = 27		

Note. Maximum score is 60

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation Acculturation Scores

	M	SD
Anglo Americans	.80	.17
n = 53		
Mexican-Americans	.20	.30
n = 53		
First-Generation Mexican-Americans	.06	.26
n = 26		
Third-Generation Mexican-Americans	.31	.30
n = 27		